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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, the autonomously owned and managed community-based organizations constituting the adult and community education (ACE) sector in Victoria, Australia, and the Victorian government have embarked on a partnership to create lifelong learning opportunities for adults. After extensive consultation with stakeholders in the ACE sector, Victoria's Adult, Community, and Further Education Board adopted a holistic view of lifelong learning and learners and proposed a series of future directions for ACE that are based on the proposition that ACE is learner centered, has education at its core, is community owned and driven, values and promotes diversity, is adaptive and responsive, and is innovative. After nine social and economic changes that have posed challenges for ACE were considered in the context of the inherent strength and culture of ACE, the following were identified as the strategic directions for ACE: widen participation in ACE through policies recognizing, responding to, and affirming the diversity of Victoria's population; augment the learning structures of ACE that will give expression to the best of lifelong learning in community settings; create self-renewing learning societies through community ownership of ACE; and apply public funds flexibly to extend opportunities and improve the quality of outcomes in ACE. (MN)

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Taking ACE to the year 2000

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A Vision

Adult, Community and Further Education Board

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Adult Education in the Community

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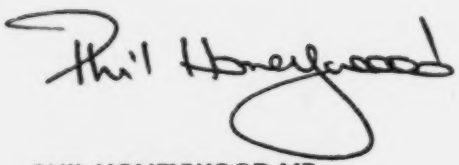
Foreword

Taking ACE to the Year 2000 sets out the strategic changes that the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board believes will be necessary if the ACE sector is to continue to thrive into the next century.

In developing the Plan, the Board has carefully considered emerging trends and drivers of adult education in the community. Extensive consultation with the Adult and Community Education sector helped form these considerations.

I believe the Plan provides a sound basis to sustain the partnership already developed between the Victorian Government and the community to create lifelong learning for all Victorians.

I have pleasure in endorsing *Taking ACE to the Year 2000*.



PHIL HONEYWOOD MP
Minister for Tertiary Education and Training

Context

The Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Act 1991 provides a framework to ensure that adult education continues to meet the community's changing needs. The ACFE Board administers funds and develops plans and policies which promote and support ACFE in Victoria. Nine *Regional Councils of ACFE* form an essential part of the network through which the board works to plan and provide resources to the adult and community education (ACE) sector.

The ACE sector is made up of community providers of adult, community and further education (ACFE). In Victoria the term ACE sector refers only to community owned and managed adult education. Community owned and managed adult education is more developed as a sector in Victoria than in any other Australian State or Territory. The *Adult, Community and Further Education Act 1991* recognises ACE as a distinct education sector by virtue of its focus on adult education and its community ownership and management.

Adult, community and further education is a shared responsibility with the State Training Board. Together the ACFE Board and the State Training Board are required by legislation to develop sequential three-year plans for the development of ACFE in Victoria. ACFE comprises general adult education, adult literacy and basic education, access and preparatory education, the VCE for adults, English as a second language, and also vocational education where it is delivered by the ACE sector.

ACFE is provided by TAFE institutes, Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES), community organisations, the Council of Adult Education and private agencies.

The Adult, Community and Further Education Board's *Taking ACE to the Year 2000* and the State Training Board's *A Vision for Training and Further Education in Victoria* will provide strategic directions for the development of plans for further education in Victoria over the next three years.

The ACFE Division of the Office of Training and Further Education supports the work of the ACFE Board as well as ensuring the effective integration of ACFE programs and provision across the State Training System.

Why have an ACE plan?

The ACE sector is flexible and innovative. Without much in the way of entrenched structures and elaborate hierarchies with vested interests, ACE organisations are freer to adapt quickly to changing educational needs and to pioneer educational initiatives.

The ACE sector is locally responsive and accessible. Its voluntary committees of management are drawn from local communities and from communities of interest. These committees of management are answerable to and exist to service the needs of those communities.

The ACE sector is defined by its self-determining status. It draws on, and enhances, positive community values and community responsibility, and promotes the autonomy of communities.

This plan sets out a vision for ACE, a mission for the ACFE Board, and strategic directions which will support achievement of the vision.

A vision for ACE

A mutual vision, shared by government and community, is the most likely way to achieve the strategic changes necessary for ACE to thrive into the next century. Over the past decade, autonomously owned and managed community based organisations (the ACE sector) and the Victorian Government have embarked on a partnership to create lifelong learning opportunities for adults.

This vision is the product of extensive consultation with stakeholders in the ACE sector and builds on the momentum that exists in the sector.

> **Vision** *Lifelong learning opportunities in ACE generate educated, empowered citizens, and a stronger Victorian community.*

A mission for the ACFE Board

The ACFE Board's mission adopts a holistic view of lifelong learning and learners, to ensure that all of its activities and decisions are focused on the broad educational goals of ACE.

> **Mission** *To lead the vigorous development of lifelong learning in the community so that more people can realise their potential as individuals, citizens and workers.*

ACE values

Progress towards realisation of a shared vision is assisted by core values and educational objectives which generate the vision, drive strategy, shape policy and inform practice.

Future directions for ACE must be intentionally built on the core values that underpin community based education. These values are the defining features of ACE. They give expression to the sector's strength and identity, and position ACE to capitalise on advantages that come its way in future times of change and uncertainty.

Five core values for ACE:

- *ACE is learner centred*
- *ACE has education at its core*
- *ACE is community owned and driven*
- *ACE values and promotes diversity*
- *ACE is adaptive, responsive and innovative*

Educational opportunities

Building on the vision and values, ACE seeks to create educational opportunities for individuals and communities to:

- **combine a broad general education with specialised knowledge and skills (to know)**
- **develop the capacities needed to undertake work (to do)**
- **learn to live interdependently (to live)**
- **take on the responsibility for the development of their own potential (to be)**

These four goals give expression to the educational values of ACE.

A new direction for ACE

The previous plan laid important foundations for the present time and future directions. The *ACFE State Plan 1996-1998* provided ACE with more secure administrative processes; introduced robust resourcing processes; positioned community owned and managed organisations to compete in the training market; supported professional development; encouraged curriculum development; promoted quality frameworks for all facets of ACE; and fostered a research culture.

It is now taken as read that community owned and managed organisations deliver learning effectively and efficiently. The continuation of quality initiatives will further consolidate ACE, and will demonstrate the capacity of educational organisations to generate quality learning.

This new plan has a set of clearly enunciated strategies and outcomes designed to drive the ACFE Board's work, and to inform Regional Councils of ACFE and community based organisations as they develop their own initiatives. The value of statewide changes and achievements, and of strategic local initiatives, will be judged by the extent to which they embody the vision and values of the ACE sector.

The new direction for ACE as we approach the twenty-first century has a redoubled emphasis on the diversity and commonality of adult learners. The ACFE Board will work to extend the quality and range of learning opportunities for these adult learners through coherent curriculum development and by further developing the means of delivering this curriculum. It is also the Board's firm intention to reach a broader population in all of its diverse educational needs, in ways which are congruent with changes in society, the economy and the world of work. In particular, the Board will seek to come to grips with the impact of new technology on learning and the power it has to serve the needs of adult learners.

Education and training must reach out to all people through our commitment to lifelong learning.

Challenges

Social and economic change offers challenges for ACE in the period of this plan. These challenges include:

- occupational and industrial changes such as the increase in part-time and casual work, entrenched unemployment and more frequent job changes
- technological and micro-economic shifts as the 'clever' country employs more information workers, and new technology is used more and more in education and training
- the internationalisation of capital, labour, education and information
- the ageing of the Australian population
- constrained government funding
- the growing disparity in income and wealth
- a renewed focus on social and civic values
- the shifting balance between work and leisure
- diverse client groups with diverse learning objectives requiring more diverse forms of education and training.

Opportunities

The Board believes that the inherent strength and culture of ACE provide opportunities for it to respond to these challenges as it moves into the future. These opportunities are:

- a new interest in lifelong learning which is consistent with ACE philosophy and practice
- worldwide attention by governments to the connection between education and training and the strength of their economy and society
- a growing government recognition of the need for workers and citizens with multiple literacies
- the devolution and flexibility of the ACE sector, generated from its inception by community choice not government decree
- changing technological possibilities which can diversify access to education and training and expand learning resources through access to global networks.

Strategic Directions

To ensure that the ACFE Board leads the vigorous development of lifelong learning in the community, so that more people can realise their potential as individuals, citizens and workers, new strategies are needed to:

- ***widen participation** in ACE through policies which recognise, respond to and affirm the diversity of Victoria's population*
- ***augment the learning structures** of ACE which will give expression to the best of lifelong learning in community settings*
- ***create self-renewing learning societies** through community ownership of ACE*
- ***apply public funds flexibly** to extend opportunities and improve the quality of outcomes in ACE*

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Strategic directions

1. Widen participation in ACE through policies which recognise, respond to and affirm the diversity of Victoria's population.

Purpose

Access to learning throughout life is fundamental to the achievement of a culture of lifelong learning. To widen participation we need to 1) improve accessibility so that learners get what they want, where they want it and at the right cost; 2) stimulate the demand for learning.

Strategic approaches

Promotion Identify, articulate and actively promote the strengths of ACE and the role of ACE in lifelong learning.

Markets Investigate, define and understand current and future markets.

Use insights into market differentiation to widen participation in ACE.

Diversity Develop skills, infrastructure and products that support the diversity of people's learning objectives and circumstances.

Identify and use the strengths inherent in the diversity of communities and individuals.

Provide opportunities in ACE for people who have not experienced equitable educational opportunities or outcomes.

2. Augment learning structures in ACE which will give expression to the best of lifelong learning in community settings.

Purpose

Education outcomes are at the heart of ACE. In the end nothing matters more than the learning transactions between learners and teachers. These transactions are shaped by the communities who bring learners and teachers together.

Strategic approaches

Professional development Ensure that professional development confirms relationships between people as central to learning.

Fund professional development which supports achievement of the Board's goals.

Broaden access to professional development through flexible delivery.

Technology Embed technology in ACE infrastructure, skills and products.

Use new learning technology to expand community based learning.

Curriculum Build on the diversity of life experience and educational goals of learners to achieve high quality educational outcomes.

Support communities and individuals to negotiate learning agendas.

Accreditation Forge strong, reliable, well connected pathways to post secondary education and paid work.

Recognition of ACE organisations Assure the quality and flexibility of education in ACE through provider recognition processes.

3. Create self-renewing learning societies through community ownership of ACE.

Purpose

The partnership between government and community in ACE extends learning opportunities beyond what could be expected from the simple expenditure of government funds. The partnership recognises that extending lifelong learning is a responsibility shared between the learners, the ACE organisation, the community and the government.

Strategic approaches

Research culture Undertake research with a special emphasis on action research in the community.

Apply research findings in ACE to inform future policy and practices.

ACE value Identify and promote the 'value added' to the Victorian economy and society by ACE.

Learning communities Celebrate the concept of self-generating, self-renewing learning communities.

Strengthen the processes and resources communities use to generate lifelong learning opportunities for adults.

4. Use public funds flexibly to extend opportunities and improve the quality of outcomes in ACE.

Purpose

The application of public funds mirrors the flexibility of ACE and matches endeavours to create the highest quality of educational outcomes in ACE. Self assessment by ACE organisations which take responsibility for the quality of their educational outcomes, is promoted through the application of ACE funds.

Strategic approaches

Quality Embed quality principles and a quality framework in ACE organisations to ensure the highest standard of services and products.

Performance management Continually improve efficiency and effectiveness in delivery of services.

Funding Ensure that flexible funding processes support diverse needs and relative costs of widening participation.

Allocate funds in an equitable, efficient and transparent manner, consistent with the Board's goals and priorities.

Extend the resource base by supporting funding partnerships that add value for learners.